



PET SUPPLIES PLUS

RICK MROZ

From the bottom floor to a new enterprise, the Mroz family roots run deep in the community.

BY: DANIEL R. AUSTIN

Rick Mroz believes in a purpose-driven life. The franchise owner of the newly opened Pet Supplies Plus in the Vacaville Commons served 23 years in the marines, is in his 17th year working for the Fairfield Police and has coached baseball in the community for nearly 25 years, including coaching varsity baseball at both Vanden and Armijo high schools. When he began considering retirement recently, Mroz couldn't see himself sleeping in, puttering around the house, and playing the occasional round of golf. So, while still working full-time as a police officer and with no business experience backing him, he decided to open the pet store. (Mroz did mention he was a risk taker—much to the chagrin of his wife at times.) "I knew that retirement was coming for me, and I wanted to have a purpose in my life. Also, I wanted to have a legacy for my children. That's my driving force. I want to be sure my children are taken care of, and if this business is successful, they should be fine," Mroz said.

To say that Mroz got in on the bottom floor to his new enterprise is an understatement. More like the basement. He says that he didn't know the first thing about even the simplest necessities: getting a business license, paying taxes, hiring, and managing inventory. "The whole process has



Rick Mroz, Franchise Owner
Pet Supplies Plus

been absolutely crazy. But I learned you have to know what you don't know," he said.

That wasn't always so easy. It took Mroz two years exactly from when he began the process until he was able to open the doors to Pet Supplies Plus, and he had to navigate many landmines during the build out process that he wasn't expecting. He recounts shelving arriving ahead of schedule and having to scramble to rent containers behind the shopping center to store them, a late arriving air filter for dog hair that set construction back ten days and struggling with his architect in Tennessee where the building codes differ. "I tried to educate myself the best I could as to what I was getting into, but there was still stuff that walloped me in the head," he said.

Things have mostly smoothed out for Mroz, and he was able to begin his soft opening in November, hold his grand opening on December 17. Pet Supplies Plus corporate is located in Michigan, and most stores east of the Mississippi are corporate run, but every store in California has a franchise owner like Mroz. He says you can't compare Pet Supplies Plus to the big box stores like PetSmart because the business model is different and Pet Supplies Plus has a much smaller footprint—think Ace Hardware compared to

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Home Depot. But because they produce many of their own products and have exclusive contracts with other companies, Mroz says customers can find many products at Pet Supplies Plus they can't find anywhere else. The franchise also employs a unique stocking strategy called striping—where they stack product from more than one company together—which allows them to increase the inventory offerings for the consumer. “Corporate has struck deals with other companies that make us unique in the marketplace,” Mroz said.

The Mroz family roots run deep in the community—Rick and his wife grew up in Fairfield where he polices, and his son lives in Vacaville—and he says that the Vacaville Commons was always his first choice to locate his store. He says that he loves how the center looks from the outside looking in and that the anchor stores Safeway and Target are well-ranked in the state. “I do notice, however, that many people turn right to Target and Safeway when coming in the main entrance on Harbison and never come this way. We get most of our foot traffic from people turning in off Nut Tree Drive.”

So, the next time you're making a Safeway or Target run at the Vacaville Commons, make a left and stop in to see the newest store in the center. Your pet will thank you.



Mountains or beach?

Beach. I love surfing.

Who wins in a fight, Batman or Superman?

That's tough, but I got to go Superman. He has superpowers. Batman is just a guy with a bunch of gadgets.

Can a vegetarian eat animal crackers?

Absolutely. No moral conflict.

If I opened your fridge what would I find?

Stuff you'd find in any fridge.

What's your best dish as a cook?

What can I cook? Maybe spaghetti?

What advice do you have for a new entrepreneur?

Whatever they tell you it's going to cost, add 25%.